

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

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11

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DPW-01 AID-20 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07

H-03 INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01

SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 OMB-01 DRC-01 /113 W

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R 250336Z SEP 74

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8977

INFO AMCONSUL CAN THO

AMCONSUL DANANG

AMCONSUL NHA TRANG

CINCPAC

USDEL JEC PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 12409

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR VS

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH NEW BISHOP OF XUAN LOC, NGUYEN VAN
LANG

FOLLOWING BIEN HOA TELEGRAM SENT SAIGON SEP 24 BEING REPEATED
FOR YOUR ACTION:

QUOTE:

CONFIDENTIAL BIEN HOA 499

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, VS

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH NEW BISHOP OF XUAN LOC, NGUYEN
VAN LANG

1. DURING MY FIRST CALL ON NEW BISHOP SEPT 23, BISHOP LANG
COMMENTED ON FATHER THANH'S ANTI-COMMUNIST MOVEMENT AND EXPRESSED
CONCERN ABOUT AMERICAN POLICY FOR VIETNAM.

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2. WHEN OUR CONVERSATION TURNED TO CURRENT ISSUES AFTER AN

EXCHANGE OF PLEVASANTRIES, BISHOP LANG SAID THAT HE DOES NOT BELIEVE FATHER THANH WILL HAVE ANY SIGNIFICANT ACTIVIST FOLLOWING IN HIS DIOCESE FOR THE PRESENT. THE DIOCESE ENCOMPASSES BIEN HOA, LONG KHANH, PHUOC TUY PROVINCES, AND VUNG TAU CITY, WHICH ARE THE MAIN AREAS OF CATHOLIC CONCENTRATION IN MR-3. IN THE DIOCESE, 36 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION IS CATHOLIC.

3. THE BISHOP SAID THAT THE "50 OR 60" FATHERS IN HIS DIOCESE WHO HAD SIGNED FATHER THANH'S "LETTER" FOR THE MOST PART NOW REGRET THAT THEY DID SO BECAUSE THEY DID NOT WANT OR EXPECT THINGS TO DEVELOP AS THEY HAVE. BISHOP LANG SAID HE THOUGHT THAT THESE FATHERS HAD NOT SEEN THE 6 POINTS AND HAD RATHER THOUGHT THEY WERE ADDRESSING ONLY THE QUESTION OF CORRUPTION IN GENERAL IN A SEPARATE LETTER. IT WAS CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT BISHOP LANG IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH PACM HAS BEEN LAUNCHED AND THAT HE WAS SPEAKING ONLY TO THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE, NOT EXCLUDING MILITANCY BY SOME FATHERS IF FATHER THANH'S MOVEMENT SPREADS.

4. BISHOP LANG APPEARS TO SHARE DOUBTS ABOUT AMERICAN POLICY CURRENT IN THE SAIGON RUMOR MILLS. NEAR THE END OF OUR CONVERSATION, BISHOP LANG QUIETLY BUT CLEARLY SAID HE DID NOT UNDERSTAND AMERICAN POLICY FOR VIETNAM. HE WENT ON THAT AFTER THE US "ENCOURAGED THE VIETNAMESE" BY SENDING FIRST ADVISERS THEN THOUSANDS OF TROOPS, THE US WITHDREW ITS FORCES BEFORE THE RVN WAS STRONG ENOUGH TO FIGHT ALONE. IN WITHDRAWING, THE US SAID IT WOULD PROVIDE "EVEN MORE MILITARY AID THAN BEFORE". REGRETTABLY, HOWEVER, HE SAID, WE NOW SEE THE USG REDUCING ITS AID. BISHOP LANG SEEMED MORE REFLECTIVE BUT NOT FULLY PERSUADED AFTER I CORRECTED HIS "EVEN MORE THAN BEFORE" OBSERVATION, REVIEWED THE DIFFERING ROLES AND CURRENT OUTLOOKS OF THE ADMINISTRATION AND CONGRESS, AND NOTED THAT EVEN THE REDUCED AID FIGURE WOULD STILL EXCEED \$1 BILLION FOR THE COMING YEAR. MY IMPRESSION WAS THAT BISHOP LANG UNDERSTOOD THE WORDS BUT DID NOT REALLY COMPREHEND (OR ACCEPT) THAT THE PRESIDENT OF THE US COULD BE RESTRAINED BY CONGRESS. HE SAID SEVERAL TIMES THAT IT IS AFTER ALL "THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT" WHICH IS CUTTING AID. IN HIS REMARKS THERE WERE OVERTONES SUGGESTING THAT HE MAY HAVE DOUBTS ARISING OUT OF STORIES CURRENT IN SAIGON THAT AMERICAN POLICY FOR VIETNAM IS CHANGING.

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5. EARLIER IN THE CONVERSATION BISHOP LANG TOLD ME THAT 12,000 COMMUNICANTS (2,000 IN THE CATHEDRAL, 10,000 OUTSIDE) WERE PRESENT WHEN HE SAID MASS IN KIEM TAN (LONG KHANH PROVINCE) THE DAY BEFORE. HE MENTIONED THIS IN SAYING HE THOUGHT SECURITY IS UPPERMOST IN THE THOUGHTS OF THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE THESE DAYS, EXCEEDING EVEN COST OF LIVING AND OTHER ECONOMIC CONCERNS. (COMMENT: WE HAVE OBSERVED THAT NORTHERN CATHOLICS, OF WHOM BISHOP LANG IS ONE,

ALREADY ONE-TIME REFUGEES FROM COMMUNIST DEPREDACTIONS, ARE NOTABLY MORE CONSCIOUS OF SECURITY PROBLEMS THAN OTHER VIETNAMESE.

6. I FOUND BISHOP LANG A QUIET, WARM, SERIOUS, AND APPEALING PERSON. HE SPEAKS ENGLISH WELL IF SOMEWHAT SLOWLY. WE HAD AN EXTENDED EXCHANGE ABOUT BISHOP CHI OF KOREA, WHO IS WELL-KNOWN FOR HIS LIBERAL ACTIVISM AND IS NOW UNDER DETENTION IN KOREA. BISHOP LANG SAID HE SHARED QUARTERS FOR 3 YEARS WITH BISHOP CHI DURING THEIR SERVICE IN ROME AND THAT BISHOP CHI HAD INDEED BEEN HIS BEST ENGLISH TEACHER. I DID NOT SENSE BISHOP CHI'S WELL-KNOWN LIBERAL TENDENCIES ARE SHARED BY BISHOP LANG AND WHAT I OTHERWISE KNOW OF HIM INDICATES THE CONTRARY. THE BISHOP TOLD ME HE WAS BORN AND RAISED IN A VILLAGE ON VIETNAM'S BORDER WITH CHINA AND THAT AS A SEMINARIAN HE FREQUENTLY TOOK LONG WALKS ACROSS THE BORDER INTO CHINA (ALTHOUGH HE DOES NOT SPEAK CHINESE). HE REFERRED TO THE PEOPLE IN PHUOC LY (A COMPLEX OF VILLAGES IN NHON TRACH DISTRICT OF BIEN HOA PROVINCE WHERE HE ONCE SERVED AS A PRIEST) AS "HIS PARISHIONERS" AND SAID THEY WERE ALL FROM HIS VILLAGE IN NORTH VIETNAM. HE WAS IN LONG XUYEN, AN GIANG PROVINCE, FOR SEVERAL YEARS BEFORE BECOMING BISHOP OF XUAN LOC. IN CATHOLIC CIRCLES, IT WAS KNOWN THAT HE WAS SCHEDULED TO SUCCEED THE PRESENT BISHOP OF LONG XUYEN WHO IS OLD AND INFIRM BUT, AS ONE OBSERVER PUT IT, THE FORMER BISHOP OF XUAN LOC DIED FIRST.

PETERS
UNQUOTE
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